

## Why I do What I do

When I was four years old, I told my parents, I was going into the military, the Army to be exact. I started buying all kinds of toy soldiers. Watching all the movies, documentaries, and reading all the books (mainly looked at all the pictures). I could get my hands on. I found what was interesting to me and it didn't matter what people said. It was mine and that was it.

Like a child I changed my mind several times but the one thing that stayed, the one that kept my passion was the military or to be more precise being a soldier. At the death of my father, my interest from being a soldier changed, not out of foolishness but out of anger to being a Marine. They go in first and always kick ass (or so were my thoughts as a child.) It was the imprudence of a recruiter, my natural knack for mistrust and time that allowed me to see that it would be a mistake if I had joined the Corps. I am not saying Marine Corps just plain sucks or is flawed in any way; it just wasn't the right choice for me. The Marine Corps did not offer me anything I thought was realistic and besides I'm one finicky mother fucker. Also I have a friend who would've never let me hear the end of it. Admittedly, he was right the mistake would have been grand. So I stepped across the hall and into the office with the symbol of my future; the U.S. Army. This all happened in November 1988. By August of 1989 I was on my way to Basic Training. Upon completion of that training on November 9, 1989 I went to Airborne School and graduated in early December of that same year. After the ordinary leave I proceeded to Germany arriving late December 1989.

They say "be careful what you wish for." While in school I found out where the "Garden of Eden" is. I made the idealistic decision that I wanted to go there one day. It was where Adam and Eve were at, the place where life began, a place where it was always tranquil, full of beauty, but most of all full of LIFE. The place I was learning about was Mesopotamia, specifically the Tigris and Euphrates River valley, present day Iraq. What was I thinking?

On December 12, 1990, I started on an experience of a lifetime. What I didn't know was that it would take a lifetime to experience it. At times, I feel like I have no other memory than preparing to mobilize or already deployed to the desert. I first arrived on December 13, 1990. Even though this place has tried to take my life, I have no hatred for it because I am never happier than when I am at the forefront of fighting and confronting practicals. I find myself comfortable here. Thirteen years later, with the capture of The

Dictator Saddam, it came full circle and I could truly call that place my home away from home. I belong there; at that place, at that time, there was nowhere else I could picture myself being. My wish if any; is that my family and friends, but most of all my children could someday understand why I do what I do. We should all make plans for the future. Don't you think?

*"If there must be trouble, let it be in my time so that my child shall know peace." Thomas Paine.*

What you are about to read is true, as best as I remember and can explain. I wrote this so I would only have to explain it once and only once. I suppose that anything, even the most important and profound event in anyone's life may seem like nothing more than a timely, silent flash if you saw it from far enough away. Knowing that, I don't have to explain makes it easier for me to talk about this significant event. Some of you know what sort of happened, most of you don't. Well...now you will.

On July 5, we were going on a routine Military Supply Route (MSR) Night Patrol towards the city of Al Fallujah (approximately 45min north of Baghdad.) This was to be our platoon's first night patrol with indigenous personnel. Normally it started at 1800hrs but due to some administrative issue, we did not leave until 2100hrs. About 15 minutes into it, as we were still getting our bearings straight our six vehicle patrol with nine in the rear (I'm driving) was ambushed.

What I saw was a bright flash to my right as the Hummer Shook violently. Time became irrelevant as the following occurred. Was it, I thought, was I and RPG (rocket propelled grenade), a mortar or a mine? Is it bad enough that I wouldn't be able to move nor could I at least get the hell out of the kill zone? First thing that was said by all "Are you OK?" Although I heard my gunner already, returning fire it was still asked. My team leader (TL) was in a position that I was not accustomed to seeing him in. Favoring his right side and not holding his weapon out the window, but still answered, "OK". What needed to happen was to let everyone know that we got hit including higher. Putting as simple as possible on the radio "we're hit, we're hit, 4-3 Charlie hit, 4-3 Charlie is hit".

While all hell was beginning to happen, a decision needed to be made; do I stay or go. If the vehicle responds and with the possibility of it blowing up, my only choice came clear, it was to get the Hummer out of the kill zone or the situation would get worse. The Hummer (still rolling) answered my

desperate call as I stepped on the pedal and moved forward albeit slow. Through all the chatter on the radio soldiers still heard me say "I need a perimeter and covering fire". To my left I saw two Humvees that were already engaging the enemy. Looking through the thick black smoke and fire I saw taillights in front of me. No one that I could figure answered my radio message, but my thoughts initially when seeing the two Humvees was that this was the perimeter. However, seeing the taillights my thoughts changed to the two Humvees were to fall in behind me to cover us until the perimeter was set. I cannot tell you how far we traveled but even after kicking the door open to let the smoke out and as the flames were getting close to my TL; it was time to get the fuck out.

By this point, we were rolling on just pure momentum so I guided the Hummer to the side of the road, announcing on the radio and yelling for everyone to bail out. I was able to retrieve my weapon the SAW (M249 Squad Automatic Weapon) and from the back seat, some 600rds (rounds) in three full drums (200rds per drum); I went about 20ft and dropped to the ground. Some time had elapsed and I realized it was going to take a lot more to blow-up the Hummer. After being yelled at for taking a few steps toward it, I quickly accessed the situation around me and saw that I was in the perimeter I had requested, so I grabbed my equipment and ran for cover.

I saw my lieutenant (LT) kneeling with my TL lying down in the open. Someone yelled "Incoming rounds!" (meaning someone was firing at us). My TL although wounded and weapon non-functional (we found out later) grabs it rolls over to the prone ready to fire to protect the LT who was still kneeling. I ran over with my 9mm in hand to the LT to remind him (exact words I can not remember). That he is supposed to be in charge and commendable as it was, I thought, that he was checking on his wounded, he has more soldiers to take responsibility of. To get behind cover, so he can start making decisions and communicating our situation to higher. We're expendable not him. His response to me was "Shut-up and don't tell me what to do!" One of the best known of old sayings is "lead, follow or get the hell out of the way." From this point on, I did not see or hear anything from him until we got back to the company area.

Some where in the middle, we echoed that call for the medic. Herself only about 4'10 and 155lbs (with gear) ran as fast as her little feet could take her. She did her job and got with help my TL to a Hummer for extraction. As we all loaded-up also.

Our direction of travel is always the 12 O'clock position. While still in organized chaos, I saw flashes from our 11 o'clock position and we began to fire. A few moments later, I saw flashes from our 9 o'clock position and

we began to fire at them. Everyone who could fire at those locations did (or so I thought, I have since found that that was not the case), the rest held they're sector of fire in view for whatever might pop up (also not true.) Since we were apparently in a new kill zone, the call finally was made for us to break out.

After securing all equipment and personnel on whatever hummer, I was wondering why someone would drive into the middle of a firefight, because some civilian did. As we started up stairs for getting us (me) out of there without a scratch, I heard "Hey! Watch out for that parked vehicle," there was a howling of Hummer tires then a loud, angry sound of a crash. The civilian vehicle was pushed back to Humvee that was partially blocking the road and hit the driver side door. I was catapulted forward from the rear compartment only to be stopped by the ceiling of the Hummer. My helmet and weapon went flying through the air like toys in a tornado. It was here when the back hatch came slamming down, unfortunately it slammed down on my head and not the latch like it was supposed to. A SGT was thrown from the Hummer and stopped short of the civilian vehicle. Smother soldier was slung forward but stopped when he hit something or else he would've cleared the Hummer.

As we regrouped in order to move once again, I started getting out looking for my weapon, I was told to forget it. I then noticed the blood on my cheek, realized I was bleeding from my head and that I didn't have my Kevlar (helmet). Naturally, I started looking for it, which I was also told to forget.

Other than taking the wrong turn back to BIAP(Baghdad International Airport) and asking for permission to puke and a cigarette; nothing else eventful happened, except...I have a Zippo with a Klingon Crest (a Star Trek symbol)on it. A close personal friend gave that to me. As I was squeezing the shit out of it in the ER, I said, "Perhaps today wasn't a good day to die." While I looked at my Gunner standing there and was wondering how bad my TL really was.

Apparently, there were some witnesses to the whole ordeal. According to them from the time they noticed the first red streak from 2 RPGs fired at us (but heard 3 booms) until they heard a "possible" crash it was only about ten minutes, with another ten to twelve minutes returning to BIAP. When it was over and we were "safe", relatively speaking, back at the company area, this was the result:

**1 Humvee destroyed, 1 Humvee with a cracked driver side door, 1 Humvee with left side rear wheel damage from the accident, CPL**

SANTOS Joselito with a rip on his DCU trousers, SPC PATINO, Oscar had a bruise on his right calf from what ever he hit, SGT PETERS, Shawn who was thrown from the vehicle had several bruises and back pain for one week, SPC VUE, Bee has a small piece of shrapnel in his leg for life and a smaller piece grazed his earlobe, SSG ANTHONY, Raymond is home recovering from shrapnel throughout his body and some hearing loss. He will eventually go back to Ft. Lewis to have a medical board to see if he will remain in the Army. As for myself, I have a nice 1 to 2 inch gash/scar on the top of my head and had severe chest pains. Not forgetting to mention all the issued and personal gear that was lost. The next day it was all business, there was no time to shed a tear, or sulk. The squad as the rest of the platoon had to continue. After eight days, all soldiers with one exception were back on night patrol.

While our platoon was on this rotation of MSR Night Patrol there were several shots fired with 2 ambushes. The second ambush had no injuries or damage to report. The bastards came close but still missed.

The rest of our company has rotated on MSR Night Patrol at least once. There has been some small arms fire and other "minor" contact, no injuries and no damage to report. However, when our 1<sup>st</sup> Plt had gone out on there rotation they were hit 6 times. One of which was a well organized simultaneous ambush from the front and rear and as well from the east and west side of the highway. There were no injuries but damage to several Humvees. The powers at be have concluded (guessed) that the ambush we survived was a rehearsal for the one 1<sup>st</sup> Plt encountered and survived. Don't ask, I'm not "the powers at be."

On our next rotation of MSR Night Patrol what a surprise we got hit again; twice in one night. Had 1 US WIA (Wounded in Action), SPC VUE, Bee got what we call a "through and through" in his left arm. That is all I would/will say about that, loosely translated "don't fucking ask".....anything period.

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This not over....forget the promise of progress and understanding. For in these dark grim futures there is only war. Or, is there: Even with the absurdity of modern warfare where you need a legal brief before taking prisoners and all sorts of sign-offs and findings and cover-my-ass bullshit. With the normal stupidity of man's ego and all the delusions of grandeur that go along with it and the hypocrisy it often breeds (all of which I despise.) War is not senseless itself. Faced with the immortal obscenity of chaos, human kind has true cause to rally around and fight for. There is a greater good, a purpose, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. America has the moral wisdom, might and may be obligated to use its military forces to protect peace and freedom around the world. As a nation, we must be a leader sense the rest of the world would not or will not take the responsibility of that leadership.

***"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bare any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose and foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."***

***John F. Kennedy***

They say with the future being so unpredictably fluid and budget constraints the order of the day high-tech weapons were going to be a critical force-multiplier. However let's not forget that machines can only do so much. Taking away human error and inefficiency also means taking away human judgment and creativity. As I have seen and understand it's human judgment and creativity are what made the Army or any organization really work. However after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War it meant that big-ticket development projects with almost unlimited budgets were a thing of the past. Where cutting-edge technology would be even more important in fighting the sort of brushfire wars and terrorist actions America will and is facing in the twenty-first century. It has been said "the bottom line is we use whatever we can use; pity, fear, ignorance, stupidity. If it's to our advantage, we use it." However are you really willing to sacrifice every human with a machine or at least majority of us?

There are those who committed a most evil and destructive crime towards us, which is why we are at war, but in war, you can only win by exterminating the enemy. Their belief is a simple one, "I'm honorable because I kill the enemy, and I kill the enemy for honor." If anything that is

dishonorable, because it leaves you with the thought of all the battles being easy, all victories simple but you end up with all glories being hollow.

Even when some of their own scholars have no compunction about going outside the law to get what they want. It is because there is too much at stake for them, both in this world and in the next. They are fanatical they believe they are on a mission their actions fully justified and sanctioned by God. The nation, the land, even their own homes mean nothing to them compared to what they perceive as the will of Allah. They seem to live in a state where human life is only valuable when it is harvested for personal honor these who have wanted to kill us or die at our hand in order to profit from the so-called honor to be had from such a fate. These individuals do not deserve justice; they deserve retribution for their actions. Please do not misunderstand me we should not go out and enjoy it, the killing I mean. Interesting how eliminating these few individuals, just happens to make the world a litter better place to live. Coincidental? You tell me.

With all the death, destruction and pain we have seen throughout the world (and with more still to come.) It has been my experience that in war there are no real victors or losers because the only thing each side has in common are not real heroes, just survivors. People will ask why any of us are here. Is it worth the pain, the suffering and death? Who would understand? Anyone? No one? To me it very simple I happen to believe that what we are doing is something good, something right. I am foot soldier, a warrior, not a warmonger. I am one that can say I am glad to have been present during this time of turmoil, war is war and we go where the President tells us and when. Specifically when it is time to do my job, the job I am best at.

***“they counted on America to be passive....they counted wrong”***  
***Ronald Reagan***

Of course a lot of this could have been prevented if we had simply nailed that Son -Of-A-Bitch Saddam when we had the chance. I'll tell you what; calling of a war simply because one hundred hours had passed; what a load of fucking bullshit. However, who am I to say anything to the powers at be, to quote Thomas Jefferson “He's the only President we have.”

At the same time I have committed a cardinal sin of any good soldier. I've place my emotions on the firing line. I've already scolded myself for becoming too attached to anything or anyone. I've left many a tearful woman behind as I move on to the next deployment.

Don't get involved not with anything. If you don't care, you won't care, and that makes the hardest parts of this army life that much easier. Do what you must, take what you need and move on. Never look back, never regret, but most of all never remember; or so were my thoughts until I had children. Life may not be the party we hoped for but while we are here we might as well dance.

As an adult, I now understand that in our adolescent years we fall in love long before we understand what it means. These loves do not usually endure. They are learning experiences. I think perhaps I shoved from my childhood gone straight unto a world of soldiers, guns and death. I missed the learning loves. Nevertheless the need for them stayed with me.

When I first joined the military, I knew there are things that I would be called upon to do because others could not. My role in society was to take action and responsibility for those who could not. I think, deep down, that's the essence of being a soldier. Evil can flourish where it is not opposed and those who are able to oppose it must to protect those who cannot protect themselves. A soldier places himself where he can defend the greatest number of people from the greatest evil. In order to pull this off it can not be out of ambition but out of duty, it is our job.

The greatest honor comes from protecting those who depend on you. I kill the enemy so someone, somewhere, most likely someone I've never met and never will meet will be happy. Again, this is one of the most honorable things in our (my) profession.

Any one making claim to sanity would find walking into combat suicidal. However very few of life experiences in life can compare to being in combat or engaging any enemy in a fight because doing that is the one point where civilization demands us to harness our animal nature and employ it against a most dangerous prey another. It is what is in a proper soldier's heart, trained to fight and survive.

Even if it cost me my life, fact is, whether at my worst or my best. I know if I do nothing I could die or even worse, my friends/comrades could die and somehow my life doesn't seem to matter much in the equation. It is more than just a rush. Part of it is patriotism, or fulfilling your duty or something too difficult to put exactly into words, especially to our loved ones.

Life is not without pain, but life concerns itself with how we handle that pain, or joy, or confusion, or triumph. Life is more than time passing before death; it is the sum total of all we make of it. Decisions may not be easy, but many are the times when not making a decision, not taking action is worse than a poor decision. Still, no matter how well prepared or



rehearsed, there is always a moment of hesitation and doubt, a split second when the mind has to storm through the adrenaline and gun through the smoke to find its balance.

Now explaining the real nature of this horror might take a lifetime. More over, in that time, however you wish it measured; we have far more important things to do. Than drum compassion into aristocrats or those who just don't get it, i.e. Pres. Obama.

War is confusion; it levels all stations and makes us work with bravery in our limbs and the ingenuity in our minds. Emotions run high. It is hard to say a system is right or wrong until it its found wanting in the fire that is battle.

However one can marvel at the way structures simply evolve organically in combat without question or a spoken decision. With focus, fear and adrenaline that high, right at the tightrope of life and death, men make simple decisions. Some well trained units due at any rate. Others don't because they lack the resolve and that organic spontaneity. So there would have to be, a completely different universe for they're to be any trust or comradeship between some soldiers. But for now, for those of us that are in the thick of this nightmare, one couldn't help respecting the soldier for that is what they(we) are: a devoted soldier of the United States of America. We don't have to like each other to make it work. A measure of understanding and honor between us should be enough.

Although I never really understood it, there are those out there who would consider me(us)sentimental fools who deserve to die. Remember though, there are just times when the sacrifice feels right; it's a judgment you'll have to make for yourself when the time comes. I know only that one must act according to their conscience and not their fear or ego.

Realistically no, not an easy decision to make, but...one that I have already made and prepared to make again. I'm in no hurry, I'll meet the place that will kill me when I meet it. I have been standing at the edge of the Abyss glaring long enough into it and I'll make that choice when it's time to be engulfed by it. If there is one thing I've learned is there's no need to look for it in advance.

Waiting is the common fighting mans' worst foe. Anxious mind had time to worry, to fear, and to anticipate. Nothing to do but gaze, doze, fidget and distress themselves with their own imagination. Such is the life of an "INFANTRY" soldier spending if not days but weeks, months, years of routine leading to boredom, interrupted by a few moments of brief and utterly pure terror. Maybe that is why being "GRUNT" I seem to have been bred to afford the luxury to view orders not given under stress of fire as

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optional fucking requests. This doesn't mean that we are not usually pretty good at taking orders; if only to occasionally reinterpreting them rather thoroughly.

What are your questions: AND so don't ever call me hero.

Therefore, after this and its all been said and done. If we live for the present we will short change the future. Living for the future is necessary if we are to have a future at all. We should have a child. Make those children. For when all has been said and done, the future is one reason why I do what I do.

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